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African Storybook

The **African Storybook** (ASb) is a literacy initiative that provides openly licensed picture storybooks for early reading in the languages of Africa. Developed and hosted by Saide, the ASb has an interactive website that enables users to read, create, download, translate, and adapt stories.[1] The initiative addresses the dire shortage of children's storybooks in African languages, crucial for children's literacy development. As of September 2017 there are more than 800 unique stories in 111 languages spoken in Africa, including English, French, and Portuguese, for a total of over 4600 stories.[2]

African Storybook

African Storybook.org

Formation	2013
Type	Nonprofit organization
Headquarters	Johannesburg, South Africa
Region served	Sub-Saharan Africa
Parent organization	Saide (http://www.saide.org.za/)
Website	africanstorybook.org (http://africanstorybook.org/)

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Background

According to the UNESCO's 2013/2014 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 30 million children in sub-Saharan Africa are out of school and over half of the children who reach grade 4 are not learning the basics in reading.[3] These challenges are related to and exacerbated by the shortage of children's books available in Africa, particularly in African languages; the major impetus for the ASb.[1] Developing mother tongue literacy before transitioning to a language of wider communication (e.g., English or French) is the policy in most sub-Saharan countries, and supported by the African Storybook initiative.

Due to the low purchasing power and demand for storybooks in Africa, along with the large number of languages, conventional publishing produces relatively few titles, particularly in African languages.[4] The open license digital publishing model of the African Storybook initiative, by contrast, makes it possible for people to print, display, and read stories on mobile devices. The ASb also places content creation in the form of writing and translating in the hands of the communities who need storybooks for early reading in familiar languages.

The ASb has been given start-up funding by Comic Relief from the United Kingdom.[1]

Stories

The vast majority of stories on the site are by African authors, mainly traditional folktales and contemporary stories, as well as some poems and songs.[2] Out of the more than 2500 stories (as of April 2016), more than half have been "ASb-approved", meaning that the initiative has checked the content and language in the storybooks.[2] All the stories are illustrated, either by professional illustrators or by the users themselves.

Development

The official launch of the website took place in Pretoria, South Africa, in June 2014, with funding from the European Union.[5] The same month there was an ASb summit at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver to advance the goals of the initiative and forge connections with other organizations.[6][7]

Pilot countries

To test and get feedback on the website and stories, ASb worked in 2014/2015 with 14 pilot sites in South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda – schools and community libraries that represent the target audience of the initiative. The pilot sites experimented with various methods of story delivery suitable for rural and peri-urban African contexts: digital projection of downloaded stories using handheld data projectors and low-cost print versions of the storybooks for individual reading.[8] In addition, there is strong advocacy to promote systemic implementation in schools, teacher education and the library networks in the pilot countries.[9][10][11]

Partner organizations and partner projects

Partners are key to the ASb mission, as the initiative relies on other organizations to bring the stories to the attention of large numbers of children and other users, and adapt and create stories for local use. ASb also collaborates with organizations doing similar work, including sharing stories, such as Pratham Books' Storyweaver (https://storyweaver.org.in/), Book Dash (http://bookdash.org/), Nal'ibali (http://nalibali.org/), Little Zebra Books (https://www.littlezebrabooks.com/), and READ (http://www.read.org.za/).[12] The independent Global African Storybook Project (https://global-asp.github.io/) was created in 2015 with the goal of translating the open-license ASb materials into non-African languages so that African stories can be accessible to children beyond the African continent. Storybooks Canada (http://storybookscanada.ca/) provides 40 stories from the African Storybook in the major immigrant and refugee languages of Canada with text and audio.

Blog

Since December 2014 the ASb blog (http://africanstorybook.org/wordpress) has served as a forum for reflections and discussions on the initiative and key concerns regarding early literacy in Africa. Prominent issues include delivering digital stories, open licence publishing models, and translating/versioning.

References

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11. Saide Newsletter. "Uganda - the Pilot Sites (http://www.saide.org.za/resources/newsletters/Vol_19_no.3_2013/Content/Uganda.htm)".
12. Saide. "African Storybook Project (http://www.saide.org.za/african-storybook-project)".

External links

- Official site (http://africanstorybook.org/)
- Saide (http://www.saide.org.za/)
- The ASb YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0ANN4QxfGrl7VmjAbaSrMA)